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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AFRICAN AMERICANS
GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Robert Pallotta

June 1998

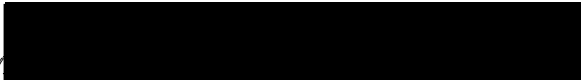
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Approved by:


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Date


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ABSTRACT

African Americans continue to find themselves in adverse conditions that prevent them from completing high school (Billingsley, 1992). This research project examines the support factors that contribute to African Americans completing high school. A postpositivist study was used to conduct this study. The sample population consisted of 21 African Americans over the age of 18 who graduated from high school. The data was analyzed using nominal measures to determine the characteristics of the study, and ordinal measures to find out the satisfaction and quality of assistance. Participants were asked to identify the stressors that were potential inhibitors toward this goal. According to the results, parents, teachers, and counselors were identified as being the most influential. In addition, living in stressful environments were factors that were identified as the most burdensome. The author suggests that African Americans need a support system in order to complete high school. The findings suggest that when parents, family members, schools, and community help is supportive to African Americans they can achieve academically. Social workers need to become more closely involved in assessing African

American children and their needs for assistance in them completing high school. In addition, monies should be invested in community based programs for added support.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Today, African Americans find themselves struggling for existence, viability, and self worth. As a group they face tremendous odds, obstacles, and are at risk of failure. An alarming number are at risk of being trapped in a web of dependency (government assistance), and poverty. Research shows that African American's are more likely to be born to a single mother who is an unemployed parent, and not go to college soon after completing high school. Approximately 60 percent of African American children are living in single parent homes headed by women compared to single to 20 percent of Anglo children. Research has also shown that two-thirds of African American female-headed families who were poor the first year after becoming female headed household came from poor households; thus, "one cannot conclude that much of the poverty could have been avoided had families stayed together. In addition, approximately 34 percent of the mothers had less than a high school education (Nichols-Casebolt, 1988).

A recent study shows that 86 percent of black youth live in poverty, approximately 75 percent of African American men are either incarcerated, on parole, or

unemployed, 1 out of every 22 black males will be killed by violent crime, 1 out of 6 black males will be arrested by the time they reach 19 years old, and 36 percent of black youth are unemployed compared to 16 percent of white youth (Hare, 1993).

The conditions in which most African American youth live in are disturbing. Far too many of these children are in communities where poverty, crime, unemployment, and other adverse conditions are commonplace. For these conditions to improve, parents and schools must put an emphasis on education. According to Dr. Finn of the Educational Testing Service, most entry level jobs require a high school diploma. In addition, the high salary jobs require college diploma. According to the U.S Bureau of the Census 1993, only 66 percent of African Americans finished high school compared to 85 percent of Caucasians. The overall graduation rate for high school students is 75 percent. Of those African American's who enter college, 70 percent will drop out at some point compared to 45 percent of whites (Steele, 1992).

People living under the previously mentioned adverse conditions appear to be focused more on survival rather than going to school and receiving an education.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, one must address their basic needs before attempting explore other needs. However, there have been some African American youth who have overcome such conditions, graduated high school, and provided opportunities for themselves for advancement (work careers, higher education). There is a need to learn more about what those factors are that help youth complete high school. Much of the research on African American youth has focused on daily negative conditions rather than providing information on how these individuals overcame such obstacles, dealt with the stressful living environment, graduated, and become successful. The researcher intends to provide much needed research in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers Maton, Salem, and Zimmerman (1995) conducted a study consisting of two hundred and fifty-four high school students from inner cities on the east coast. They mailed questionnaires to randomly selected youths from school district dropout list, recruitment by peers, referrals from community programs (Urban League), and solicitation through posters and flyers. Researchers found that seventy percent of African American males in

the study left school before graduating. Most of the black youths who left did so in the ninth grade. In regard's to African American youth, leaving school before graduation has been associated with alcohol and substance use, participating in fighting and carrying a weapon, economic disadvantage, and poor academic skills. In addition to the youths' school status, their geographic and ethnic backgrounds make them particularly vulnerable to many deleterious outcomes. Researchers agree that school dropout rate are higher in urban schools than in the nation as a whole (e,g., Maton et al., 1995).

These authors concluded that due to the high dropout rate, African Americans received more support from extended family members. They analyzed that research which emphasizes the traditional nuclear family may be inappropriate when studying African American Families. Life circumstances, other than family structure, may be more germane. Different explanatory frameworks from those that are usually applied to mainstream culture may be necessary for understanding family influences on adolescent development among high-risk urban African American males. Low-income minority children with a supportive adult, parent, role model, or mentor can

develop into autonomous and competent young adults. The researchers also discovered that the presence of a supportive adult was a significant protective factor for low-income minority youths, and the presence of supportive fathers whether or not they live in the home, may be more important for urban African-American males development (e.g., Maton et al., 1995).

In the black community, there appears to be a lack of resources and parental support to help children pursue an education. According to Palley and Robinson (1990) This in part may be due to the stressful situations found in urban areas. Approximately ninety percent of black victims were killed by black assailants. The homicide rate is ten times greater for black males ages fifteen to forty than white males. In addition, the homicide rate is five times greater for black females than white females (Palley and Robinson, 1990).

Since blacks are plagued by higher unemployment rates, lower labor force participation rates, and slower movement out of poverty. Homicide rates among blacks will remain high. Sociologist William Julius Wilson states, "African American's are increasingly becoming isolated from mainstream patterns of norms and behavior. There is

a need for employment programs, vocational training, and educational innovations -- there is also a need for improvement of health, housing, and social services (Palley and Robinson, 1990). "

Kimberly (1995) conducted a study that focused on the motivational pattern(s) of African American students and what effects parents have on them achieving in school. This study was based on data gathered on 40 African American high school students from urban school districts in Texas. High school students from adverse and impoverished background with grade point averages of 2.75 and above were considered academically resilient. The 40 subjects were all from the lowest socio-economic groups. The parents were unemployed and earning wages below the poverty line. To determine resiliency status, socioeconomic status was determined by the Hollingshead Two factor Index and stress by a self-report measure. Self-concept and motivation were measured by high school assessment of academic self-concept, and the assessment of personal agency beliefs (Gordon, 1995).

Self-concept is a multifaceted phenomenon consisting of beliefs about one's own abilities, beliefs about environmental supportiveness, and emphasis placed on

certain goals. To illustrate, a lack of beliefs in environmental supportiveness lowers one's self-concept. A good student who does not believe their environment supports their achievements loses some belief in their abilities. Beliefs about the ability determine how strongly a person believes in his or her own capability or skill for accomplishing a goal. All three factors--ability, environmental supportiveness, and importance of goals--combine to create a person's self-concept (Gordon, 1995).

Motivational patterns help students to overcome obstacles and endure stressors. Motivational patterns focuses on self-concept in a cognitive manner (cognitive self-concept, cognitive environment, cognitive importance). Extracurricular activities help students to become a part of their school environment, foster more care, concern about the student's and the well-being of their school. The goal of material gain is, one's realization that freedom, independence, and self-sustenance accompany economic independence. In other words, students are mature enough to realize that accumulation of material goods and artifacts is important to the survival of their culture (Gordon, 1995).

The self-concept of resilient African American students definitely differs from that of nonresilient African American students. The resilient students have a healthier cognitive self-concept. This healthy self-concept is protective during times of stress and adversity. This is associated with academic achievement. In addition, findings show that cognitive, extracurricular, and material gain motivational patterns are the most discriminating in African American high school students. Resilient students believed strongly in their cognitive self-concepts, which allowed for better academic achievement and led to graduation.

Giordano, Cernkovich, and DeMaris conducted a study focusing on ethnic differences and the way adolescents view their friendship and family relations. The researchers believe that examining the two previously mentioned categories, will provide a better understanding on how social networks influence important outcomes such as academic achievement and delinquent involvement (Giordano, Cernkovich, and DeMaris, 1993).

Giordano and his colleagues (1993) used a sample population that consisted of 942 adolescents age 13-19 in Toledo, Ohio. Their sample population consisted of 45%

white, 50% black; Females made up 51% of the sample, and males made up 44%. The survey they used asked questions pertaining to friendship and family relations, social skills, competencies, socioeconomic status, involvement in delinquent activities, academic success, race, and sex. Students were measured on a scale (ranging from 1-8) about family control, family intimacy, peer mutuality, peer affiliation, peer pressure, peer approval, and peer influence. For example, one question read, "How important is it to you to do things with your friends approval?" The respondents answered according to the following scale 1= not important, 8= very important. (e.g., Giordano et al., 1993).

The results indicate that black youth (age 13-19) scored higher on both family measures (intimacy, control), and lower on peer dimensions. White youth scored higher on peer dimensions, and lower on family measures. For black youth, peer influence on academic achievement and delinquent behavior was not indicated. Instead the results showed that black youth were influenced mainly by their parents and their beliefs. Parents of these black youth were interviewed several months after the study. Most of them felt it was important to develop their

child's sense of individuality and independence, which they saw as necessary if they were to make their way in a difficult world.

Research in the past has shown that parents interact with their children differently. Gold and Harris compared the impact of absent fathers and fathers who were in the home during their daughters academic achievement during high school. Specifically, parents provided feedback to daughters in a more cooperative and concrete way than they did for sons. They also provided more feedback to the daughters than to the sons about performance. In contrast, parents taught their sons problem-solving strategies and were more directive as well as more approving or disapproving of their sons than their daughters (Gold and Harris, 1991).

The Gold and Harris (1990) study attempted to answer the following: Do women whose father is absent score higher in achievement and lower in affiliation needs than do women whose fathers are present? Do black women whose fathers are absent score higher in achievement and lower in affiliation needs than do black women whose fathers are present? Does the same apply for white women in similar circumstances (absent or present fathers)? If fathers are

absent, do women score higher on masculinity and androgyny than women with fathers present? Questionnaires were given to fifty-four women rating the effects of fathers presents and/or absence while growing up. The findings conclude that women whose fathers were absent would be higher on achievement needs and lower on affiliation needs than those whose fathers were present. The same held true in comparison to white women. The absence of the father in the family also does not seem to influence the gender-role orientation of women as expected to be measured (Gold and Harris, 1991).

The results of the Gold and Harris (1990) study suggest that the fathers had some impact on their daughters achievements and affiliation. The article also showed fathers do not influence the gender-role orientation of women. This research seems to challenge single parent homes that are headed by women. Are the fathers making a positive impact on their children's lives? There appears to be a need for more research in this area.

Rose examined women and children's attitude toward absent fathers. Father's who fled responsibility, mother's raising children on their own due to accidental

pregnancy, and divorce (1992). The researcher asked two questions: (1) What roles do fathers have in families led by single mothers who remain single; and (2) How do children of single mothers view fathers? They surveyed two hundred families (adults and children) consisting of mothers, unmarried couples, families in communal households, and they compared them to households in which couples were married (Rose, 1992).

Children's Projective tests were also used to determine feelings and fantasies about the absent father. The results showed that those with little contact tended to feel that their fathers had a negative view of them. This pattern suggests that young children may account for their fathers' absence by feeling rejected and by blaming themselves for it. From the children's point of view, they may believe that fathers do not live with them or see them more frequently because there is something bad, or disappointing about them. Evidently, fathers absence can have negative psychological effects on children (Rose, 1992).

McLanahan (1989) examined the effects of family structure on high school graduation rates. He focused on offspring behavior and its relationship to graduation from

high school; his interest was to learn if female-headed families are producing an "underclass." According to the research, children may terminate their schooling for reasons other than poor achievement. In particular, early entrances into the labor force, early pregnancies, marriages, and economic necessity. These factors may prove to be more critical in explaining family structure effects than academic performance itself (McLanahan, 1989).

McLanahan's (1989) research showed that being African American, having little education couples with a low paying job is directly related to the formation of single-parent families that this can lower educational attainment in their children. With respect to schooling, the absence of father appears to decrease motivation for psychosexual development, resulting in poorer academic performance and premature termination of schooling. According to the author, children who live in female-headed families are less likely to complete high school than those living with two parents.

Taylor (1993) conducted a study that examined of two thousand African American high school seniors living in single parent (female) headed households. The study was

conducted throughout Chicago's public schools. The researchers wanted to examine the importance of a high school diploma through interviews. Seventy-seven percent of the seniors felt that high school was a "dead end" for them. They did not believe it was possible for them to receive an education beyond high school. However, the seniors seemed to acknowledge the fact that they would need a college education in order to succeed; and that they would be more likely to go to college if families had the money to send them. Seventy-five percent mentioned that if their fathers and or relatives were helping out more financially, they would have a better opportunity to succeed (Raspberry, 1993).

This research, by Raspberry (1993), suggests that self-esteem, goals, and hope were lacking within individuals in his sample. The authors were guided by the assumption that the breakdown of the family has an influence on how high school students perceive school. Raspberry's research showed that when present, father's in the home can have a more positive impact on their children's being able to complete high school.

Johnson and his colleagues (1987) examined the home environment of a population of low income, academically

talented minority youth and its relationship to high school achievement. These students were doing well in school (from sixth to twelfth grade) despite environmental conditions that may impede development of minority children. The author describes the pattern of environmental variables that exists for this population with regard to family size, parents configuration (single versus two parents), parental beliefs and values concerning education, and examines the interactive nature of variables for their joint effect on academic achievement. The researchers were interested in the way in which parent configuration interrelated with other environmental variables to influence academic performance. The study also considered as environmental factors children's personality, attitudes and perceptions about themselves. Finally, the study assessed the overall effects of the home variables and student personality in high school grades. By doing this, it sought to point out the role played by the home environment in the total development of achievement among academically talented minorities (Jackson, Johnson, and Wallace, 1987).

The subjects used in the John Wallace study (1987) were 767 minority students of A BETTER Chance, Inc. (ABC),

a non-profit educational organization which identifies academically talented children of low-income background as possible candidates for college secondary schools. Of the 767 students who responded 80% were black, 12% were Hispanic, American Indian and Asian comprised of 4%. The respondents ranged from age 18-33. The gender composition of the sample was 44% female and 56% male. Variables derived from the survey which formed the basis for analysis included: (1) Students GPA which was derived from math and English classes since students were required to take those courses. (2) Parents educational background from less than high school education to college degree. (3) Parents values and beliefs about academics (Jackson, Johnson, and Wallace, 1987).

The evidence showed that the academically successful students come from families with parents of various educational levels and is not necessarily a good predictor of GPA. The average GPA among the students was 3.0 (B average). Concerning the parents beliefs and values, the evidence suggests that in spite of hardships and barriers, which often tend to limit achievement and social advancement, this group of parents must have had high aspirations for and high expectations of their children.

There are likely to have encouraged them to pursue high levels of education and to pursue challenging careers (Jackson, Johnson, and Wallace, 1987).

The evidence reveals that the ABC parents had high expectations of their children to do well academically, as well as encouraged them to pursue high levels of education. This was definitely a collaborative effort of the child's self-determination, and the parents beliefs and values that influenced these minority youth to finish high school.

In a ten year study of black families, Chatters and his colleagues (1990) discussed the importance to black families in a child development. The authors discussed (1) black families in relation to their age, gender, and family roles, (2) substantive issues of relevance to black American families, including social support and psychological well-being, and (3) an examination of recent demographic trends in black family structure (Chatters, Lewis, Taylor, and Tucker, 1990).

Black youth are frequently portrayed as urban, low-income, plagued by a multitude of problems, and lacking resources or motivation to effect change in their lives. According to the authors, black women who are poor, and

single parents suffer chronic economic and household stress. They also found that black mothers who had someone to help them with child care were less likely to report stress. The authors note that the absence of a reliable knowledge based on the role of black men in families has resulted in a portrayal of black men as peripheral to family. Black men are viewed as a inadequate fathers, providers, and spouses (e.g., Chatters et al., 1990).

According to the authors, black families receive some social support from extended family members. For many black families the church is still the main social support system. Church members were important sources of assistance for coping with stress associated with racism, marital difficulties, and psychological problems. Further, religious participation has been found to buffer psychological distress among blacks (e.g., Chatters et al., 1990).

Black families require some social support from external family members. For many black families the church remains a strong system of support. Church members in the Chatters and colleagues study (1990) were found as important sources of assistance. Church members help

black families cope with stress associated with racism, marital difficulties, and personal problems (e.g., Chatters et al., 1990). Based on Chatters research, it seems that churches continue to play a central role in helping black families retain their integrity. Black churches may be useful in helping families keep their children in school.

PROBLEM FOCUS

After thorough research, the writer believes that there are numerous factors that impede an African American chances to graduate high school. The rise of absent fathers and female-headed households, living in poverty stricken areas, lack of resources in the community, black on black crime, and negative peer influences (drugs, gangs). African American youths' would appear to have difficulties surviving, let alone thriving in school. Despite all the problems, there have been some African American youth who persevered and completed high school. However, in order for African American's to be successful, there needs to be more positive influences that can offset the many negatives they will need to overcome. According to the writer's research, there is little information on this topic. The researcher believes that there are

various factors which effect African American youth's ability to graduate from high school. The researcher will examine these factors in this project.

HYPOTHESIS

African American youth who have supportive influences in their lives are more likely to graduate from high school than those African American's who do not.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study will use the postpositivist paradigm which allows the interviewer to discover theory about the research topic. Postpositivist theory seek to pursue causality by using logical procedures to distinguish the influences of interrelated variables. Postpositivist theory posits that there is an objective external reality, and yet recognizes, its elusive nature. Instead of attempting to verify universal laws, postpositivists examine the conditions under which particular ideas and hypotheses are and are not falsified (Rubin and Babbie, 1997). Methods that are guided by the postpositivist theory focus on data collection and analysis involved in doing research.

Sample

The sample came from a general population in the San Bernardino County area. The sample population includes approximately twenty-one adult African Americans (age 18 and over) who had graduated high school. The ages of the participants ranged from eighteen to fifty years of age.

Instrumentation

This study used survey to elicit the participants gender, academic level, and family's income level during high school. In addition, participants were ask to report on their family background, external influences in their lives (friends, teachers and neighbors), feelings about school, and environmental stressors. This researcher will gather data using a structured interview process. A copy of the questionnaire is in appendix A.

Data Collection

The participants were contacted at a church picnic to participate in the survey interview. In order to ensure confidentiality, the interviews took place in a private location with no external observers present. The survey interviews will be conducted in a semistructure interview format that presents a series of questions designed to

elicit information regarding new experiences in the way to high school graduation.

A consent form was signed by the participants, allowing the researcher to collect information, and audio record participants if additional questions arise. When the questionnaires were collected the researcher summarized the purpose of the research project and invited additional questions. Participants were informed that a copy of the research project will be in the social work department at California State University, San Bernardino. In addition, the participants were assured of confidentiality, and each person was informed about the purpose of the research. The person's involved were also informed that while answering the questionnaire or participating in the interview can terminate at any time if the participant(s) should so desire.

ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis use of numbers, averages, and other figures to determined relationships between several factors plus high school graduation. Nominal measures were used to determine characteristics of the study. In addition, ordinal measures were used to determine rank.

This will allow the researcher to examine factors regarding the graduation rate of African American's.

RESULTS

Demographics

The sample consisted of twenty-one African American men and women and their ages ranged between 18 and 50 years. The largest group of participants ranged between the ages of 18 and 25 (43%). The next largest portion of participants were between the ages of 26 and 35 (29%). The remaining participants ranged between the ages of 36 and 50 (29%).

Twelve of the 21 participants were men (57%), and 9 women (43%). For approximately half (10) of the participants, the grade point average ranged between 3.0 and 3.4 (48%). The next largest group consisted of five participants who graduated with a grade point average of 2.0 and 2.4 (24%). Two participants grade point average ranged from 3.5 and 4.0, two participants ranged from 2.5 to 2.9, and only two participants graduated high school with under a 2.0 grade point average.

Table 1 Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Sample (N 21)

Variable	Number (N)	Percent (%)
Age		
18-25	9	43%
26-35	6	29%
36-50	6	29%
Gender		
Male	12	57%
Female	9	43%
Grade Point Average		
3.5-4.0	2	10%
3.0-3.4	10	48%
2.5-2.9	2	10%
2.0-2.4	5	24%
under 2.0	2	10%
Economics		
under \$20,000 (per year)	11	52%
\$20,000-\$50,000 (per year)	9	43%
Over \$50,000 (per year)	1	5%
Other Degrees Earned		
Associates Degree	4	19%
Bachelors Degree	4	19%
Masters Degree	0	0%
Doctorate Degree	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Degree Not Earned	13	61%
Current Status		
Student	5	24%
Employed	12	57%
Unemployed	2	10%
Self-employed	2	10%
Other	0	0%

Fathers Education**Attainment**

Elementary	3	14%
Junior High School	6	29%
High School	11	52%
College	1	5%
Masters Degree	0	0%
Other	0	0%

Mothers Education**Attainment**

Elementary	0	0%
Junior High School	4	19%
High School	12	57%
College	5	24%
Masters Degree	0	0%
Other	0	0%

Siblings Education**Attainment**

Elementary	1	5%
Junior High School	6	29%
High School	10	48%
College	3	14%
Masters Degree	1	5%
Other	0	0%

Goals/Aspirations

College	11	52%
Trade School	4	19%
Work (full or part time)	6	29%

Slightly more than half of the participants' reported that while they were in high school their families income was under \$50,000 per year. Eleven (52%) of the participants families average income during the time they graduated high school was under \$20,000 per year. Nine (43%) families earned between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per year. Only one participant's family earned over \$50,000 when they graduated from high school.

Four participants reported that they earned academic degrees after graduating from high school. Nineteen percent of the participants' had Bachelor degrees, and four (19%) participants' reported they had Associate of Arts degrees. The remaining participants' (62%) did not go on to earn a college degree.

The participants current status showed twelve (57%) were employed, and two participants were self employed (10%). Five (24%) participants were currently in college, and only two (10%) participants were are unemployed.

Eleven participants reported that their parents and siblings. Fifty-two percent of the fathers finished high school. Six of the (29%) participants' fathers finished junior high school, and three (14%) completed elementary school. Only one of the participants' fathers completed

college. Of the participants mothers, twelve (57%) completed high school, and only four (19%) finished junior high school. However, the mothers who completed college made up almost half of those that did complete high school. Five (24%) of the participants mothers completed college.

The participants indicated that they only had one sibling. Ten (48%) of the participants, siblings completed high school. Three (14%) siblings completed college, and one (5%) individual had their Masters degree. Six (29%) finished junior high schools, and one (5%) only completed elementary school.

The participants' long term goals and aspirations after completing high school showed eleven with a desire (52%) to go college. Six (29%) participants planned to work either full time or part time, and four (19%) anticipated going to a trade school.

Family and Non Family Influences

Information gathered regarding those individuals who were most influential in them completing high school was based on ranking.

Table 2 Family and Non Family Influences Towards
Completion Of High School (N 21)

Rank	Most Influential (N) (%)		Somewhat Influential (N) (%)		Least Influential (N) (%)	
Family Members						
Mother	15	71%	5	24%	1	5%
Father	3	14%	6	29%	4	19%
Brother	1	5%	3	14%	3	14%
Non-Family Members						
Teacher	7	33%	8	38%	6	29%
Counselor	6	29%	5	24%	4	19%
Mentor	3	14%	1	5%	2	10%
Friend	4	19%	3	14%	6	29%
Neighbor	1	5%	4	19%	3	14%

Participants were asked to rank from one to three (1 being most and 3 being least) those who were the most instrumental in receiving their high school diploma.

The participants indicated those who were most influential in their completing high school include family members, and people outside of their family.

Concerning to the participants parent's, fifteen (71%) indicated that their mother was most influential in their completing high school. Five participants indicated that their mother was second most influential, and one felt their mother was the least influential to them. Three (14%) participants indicated their father was the most influential. Six showed that their father was the second most influential, and four showed their father was the third most influential.

The data gathered for siblings who were most influential showed only one (5%) participant's brother, being the most influential. Three indicated that a brother was the second most influential; and three showed their brother being third most influential.

When asked to rank those individuals outside of the family who were the most influential, seven (33%) participants selected a teacher as most influential in

their receiving their high school diploma. Eight showed a teacher as being the second most influential, and six indicated that a teacher was the third most influential. Six (29%) indicated a counselor was most influential. Five indicated a counselor was second most influential, and four showed a counselor was the third most influencing. Four (19%) indicated a friend was most influential in them finishing high school. Three selected a friend as the second most influential, and six showed a friend as third most influential. Concerning mentors, three (14%) showed a mentor being most influential. One showed a mentor was the second most influential to them, and two indicated a mentor was the least influential. Those participant's who felt a neighbor was influential in them receiving a high school diploma, only one (5%) felt a neighbor was the most influential. Four showed a neighbor was the second most influential, and three felt a neighbor was the third most influential.

Structural Elements

The data for structural elements was also gathered by participants, ranking from one to three, specific elements that were also influencing in their completing high school.

their receiving their high school diploma. Eight showed a teacher as being the second most influential, and six indicated that a teacher was the third most influential. Six (29%) indicated a counselor was most influential. Five indicated a counselor was second most influential, and four showed a counselor was the third most influencing. Four (19%) indicated a friend was most influential in them finishing high school. Three selected a friend as the second most influential, and six showed a friend as third most influential. Concerning mentors, three (14%) showed a mentor being most influential. One showed a mentor was the second most influential to them, and two indicated a mentor was the least influential. Those participant's who felt a neighbor was influential in them receiving a high school diploma, only one (5%) felt a neighbor was the most influential. Four showed a neighbor was the second most influential, and three felt a neighbor was the third most influential.

Structural Elements

The data for structural elements was also gathered by participants, ranking from one to three, specific elements that were also influencing in their completing high school.

Table 3 Structural Elements and Contributing Factors
Towards Completion Of High School (N 21)

Rank	Most Influential		Somewhat Influential		Least Influential	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Sources of Help						
School Work	8	38%	5	24%	8	38%
Encouragement	7	33%	10	48%	3	14%
Spiritual Guidance	2	10%	3	14%	4	19%
Advice	4	19%	3	14%	6	29%
Group Help						
Church Group	9	43%	7	33%	5	24%
Sports Team	12	57%	6	29%	1	5%
Other						
TV Show/Movie	1	5%	3	14%	12	57%
Actor/Celebrity	3	14%	1	5%	5	24%
Book	5	24%	10	48%	1	5%
Self Motivation	12	57%	4	19%	0	0%

Participants were asked to indicate how those individuals were influential to them. Help with homework ranked as most influential for eight (38%) of the participant's. Five indicated that helping them with their school work was the second most influential to them, and eight showed that those individuals who assisted them in school work was the third most influential in receiving their diploma. Seven (33%) participants indicated that a person's encouragement was most influential to them. Ten felt encouragement was the second most influential to them, and three showed that an individual who was encouraging was the third most influential in receiving their high school diploma. Four (19%) indicated a person to give advice was the most influential to them. Three showed that individual was the second most influential, and six indicated that a person who gave them advice was the third most influential to them. Two (10%) participants showed that person who gave them spiritual guidance was the most instrumental in them finishing high school. Three felt that the individual who provided spiritual guidance was the second most instrumental, and four indicated that person was the third most instrumental to them.

The participants reported only two groups that were most instrumental in them receiving their high school diploma. Being on a sports team while in high school showed to be by a substantial count factor in finishing high school. Twelve (57%) participants indicated that being apart of a sports team was the most influencing to them in receiving their diploma. Six indicated that being on a sports team was the second most influential to them, and one felt being on a sports team was third most influential. Nine participants (43%) showed that being involved in a church group was the most instrumental in them graduating high school. Seven indicated that being apart of a church group was the second most influential in them finishing high school, and five showed that a church group was the third most influential.

Other elements that were factors for the participants in graduating high school include self- motivation, a book, an inspiring actor or celebrity, and a television show or movie. Twelve (57%) participants indicated that self-motivation was an element that was most influential in them finishing high school. Four indicated that self-motivation was second most influential, and no one showed self-motivation as being the least influencing in them

finishing high school. Five (24%) participants showed reading a particular book was most influential them finishing high school. Ten showed that reading a book was the second most influential to them, and one participant indicated that reading a book was the third most influential to them receiving their diploma. Three (14%) showed that an inspiring actor or celebrity was most influencing to them. One indicated that an actor or celebrity was the second most influential, and five showed that an actor or celebrity was inspiring in them receiving their high school diploma. Only one (5%) participant indicated that a television show or movie was a key factor in completing high school. Three felt a television show or movie was inspiring in them receiving their diploma, and twelve showed either a television show or movie was influential to them.

Stress Factors

Participants were also asked to rank the stress factors most burdensome in their finishing high school. A large portion of the participants indicated that living in a violent environment, or gang and drug infested environment was the most burdensome in them completing high school.

Table 4 Stress Factors Towards Completion Of
High School (N 21)

Rank	Most Influential		Somewhat Influential		Least Influential	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Stress Factors						
Violent Environment	9	43%	5	24%	3	14%
Drug/Gang Environment	8	38%	7	3%	3	14%
Death of Family Member	0	0%	7	33%	8	38%
Illness in Family	4	19%	2	10%	7	33%

Nine (43) of the participants indicated that living in a violent environment was most burdensome to them in receiving their diploma. Five indicated that living in a violent environment was second most burdensome to them, and three showed living in a violent environment was the third most stressful factor in them finishing high school. Eight (38%) participant's showed living in a gang and/or drug infested environment was the most burdensome to them in receiving their high school diploma. Seven indicated that it was the second most burdensome, and three indicated that living in a gang and/or drug environment was the third most burdensome in them receiving their diploma. Four (19%) of the participant's showed that an illness in the family was the most burdensome in them receiving their diploma. Two participant's showed that an illness in the family was the second most burdensome, and seven indicated that an illness in family was the third most burdensome in them receiving their diploma. None of the participant's indicated a death in the family was the most burdensome in them receiving their diploma. However, seven showed that a death in family was the second most burdensome in them finishing high school; and eight indicated that a death in the family was the third most

burdensome in them receiving their diploma. None of the participant's indicated that other factors were burdensome to them in graduating high school.

DISCUSSION

Demographics

The participants age range was between eighteen and fifty for this project. Research pertaining to African American's finishing high school usually examines those who graduated within a particular age range. By examining participants who graduated high school during different decades would support that African American's have had usual and customary influences to complete high school. Participants consisted of graduates from the 1970's, 1980's, and the 1990's. Limits of time did not permit a more evolvement to include individual's who did not complete high school.

Demographics regarding gender taken from the sample population indicated men out numbered women in the sample by three. The majority of the participants indicated that they were above average academically. This could be an indication that the participants received help to maintain average grades to complete high school, and go to college or go to work. In the literature review, the study

conducted on high school students in Texas shows that environmental support, study skills, and belief in one's own ability to succeed can lead to academic achievement and enhance one's self-concept (Gordan, 1995). When African American students gain a healthy self-concept they are better equipped to cope with adversity and stress that plague them. However, the inability to maintain average grades for African American's may indicate that they are not receiving the assistance they need, or that there are many stressors within their environment that may impede their determination to finish high school. There is a need for more research to determine with more precision, the role of self-concept and supportive influence may have in youth completing high school.

The participants' family income during the time of graduation indicated that more than half came from low socio-economic neighborhoods. Fifty-two percent of those participants' reported that their families earned less than twenty thousand dollars a year. African Americans families who earn less than twenty thousand dollars a year, may be living in a stressful environment which in turn makes it difficult to focus on completing high school. A review of the literature has shown that if

African Americans are not economically stable in terms of income earned and overall affordable living. It will be very challenging to compete in mainstream society if conditions in the African American community are not improved. Gordan's (1995) study proved that one can achieve academically and finish high school while living under such conditions. Intervention should nevertheless be aimed towards programs in schools, employment opportunities, vocational training, affordable housing to ease one's level of stress and enhance coping skills.

Close to half of the sample went in to college. Eight out of the twenty-one participants' earned either a Bachelor degree or an Associate of Arts degree. These findings proved that there is a possibility that one can continue their education after high school eventhough one's family earned income makes it difficult for these individual's to attend. The current literature points to the difficulties African American's have paying for college because of the families earned income. Research in this area is needed to determine if African Americans are able to continue their education without the financial assistance of their families. If so, what are the ways?

Occupational status among the sample population resulted in approximately sixty-five percent being employed, and only about nine percent being unemployed during high school. The rest of the participants were enrolled in college or trade school. The inability to work creates not only financial burdens, but it also creates stress for individuals. The need for a high school diploma to work in most companies or industries in the United States is well known. The participant's current status appears to prove that a high school education can lead to more options in one's career (college, work). Although one can get a job without a high school diploma, it is likely that one with a diploma will have a better chance because of the education that was obtained.

Fifty-two percent and fifty-seven percent, respectively, of the sample showed fathers and mothers completing high school. These findings showed that slightly more than half of the participants' parents had finished high school. According to Johnson and his colleagues (1987) parents educational levels is not a good predictor in determining children's academic achievement. They found that parents beliefs in their children's

ability, values, and encouragement is evidence that will suggest that in spite of hardships and barriers these family's face, youth will achieve academically and pursue challenging careers in their adult years. Arguably, parent's who graduated from high school may be more able than those who do not to assist their children with their school work because of their education level. The impact parents have on their children is felt in many ways. It would appear that both parent's need to be involved in their children's lives, particularly during their school years, to insure that their children will have the support they would need to finish high school.

A review of the participants' sibling's educational achievement showed a high number of them finishing high school. Thirteen of the participants' sibling's completed high school. The participant's did not indicate if their sibling(s) were older or younger. Examining sibling relationships and their impact on each other would be interesting.

Statistics in this study regarding goals and aspirations indicated that a large percentage of the participants wanted to go to college or work after they completed high school. A review of the literature has

indicated that when goals are set, belief in the ability to achieve those goals with community support, individuals will graduate from high school which will present opportunities to advance in their careers (e.g., Chatters et al., 1990). However, due to lack of community support, environmental stressors, and, apathy, it makes it make it difficult for them to achieve academically in high school. To know how to achieve those goals, research is needed to find ways that African American's can receive help or guidance.

Family and Non Family Influences

Of the twenty-one respondents who participated in the research project, everyone reported that their mother an influential factor in their completing high school. The literature supports their beliefs in that the mother is the main reason why these individuals will graduate from high school. According to Nichols-Casebolt (1988) approximately sixty percent of African American children are raised in a single parent female home. It is evident that the mother would have the most influence on their children finishing high school because typically most fathers spend less time with the children or are not around to give support (emotional, encouragement, help

with school work). Research also indicates that the majority of African American men are incarcerated, unemployed, or on parole (Hare, 1993). African American youth need to see African American men doing positive things so they can model their lives in that way.

In addition, the participants indicated that counselors and teachers have a more significant influence than a child's father. The researcher believes that this is due to many of the African American fathers not taking an active role in their child's education whether in the home or not. The father was chosen three times as being the most influential to children completing high school. This is in contrast to mother being selected fifteen times; teacher eight times; and counselor seven times. The literature holds true in that mothers and extended help (outside the family) are guiding African American youth in school and play a major role in shaping their lives (Raspberry, 1993).

Structural Elements

Concerning structural elements, twenty-one participants reported someone who helped them with their homework was influential to them, and twenty selected encouragement as being influential in their completing

high school. According to Johnson and his colleagues (1987), parents who encouraged their children, and believed in their ability to achieve academically ultimately did.

Churches also have an influence on the graduation rates of African American youth. All twenty-one participants reported that being a part of a church group was influential in their completing high school. According to the Chatters and colleagues study (1990), the church plays a central role in the African American community in terms of helping people with personal problems, stress, and school difficulties. Concerning a sports team, nineteen of the twenty-one participants was influenced by being on a sports team. What is interesting is that twelve of the participants indicated that being on a sports team was the most influential in their receiving their high school diploma; eight reported that someone helping with their school work; and seven reported that someone was encouraging to them. This is in contrast to nine who reported being a part of a church group was most influential. A sports team out ranked the church, and help with school work and encouragement was ranked almost identical. Although the literature indicates that the

church is one of the main support systems in the African American community, it appears that people's view of the church is diminishing as far as the type of assistance they are providing to youth. In order to play on a sports team one has to maintain average grades to participate. One can argue that sports figures are sending more positive messages to youth in terms of being role models and indicating the things they did to complete high school.

The churches impact on youth is important, but being able to continue school after completing high school is just as important to African American youth. The literature has shown that it is difficult for African Americans to go to college because of their family's earned income. If they are able to go to college on an athletic scholarship, then being on a sports team would be influential to them because they will work hard to receive a scholarship. Research in this area is needed discover if school athletics are having more of a positive impact on African Americans completing high school than the church (e.g., Chatters et al 1990).

The participants selected self motivation and a book sixteen times as being influential in their completing

high school. Fifty-seven percent of the participants selected self motivation as being most influential. According to Gordon (1995) an individual who believes that living in adverse conditions such as crime and poverty, one can preserve if they motivate themselves and believe in their own abilities to achieve in school. There is a possibility that increasing numbers of books on African American achievement could be useful in most children to complete high school.

Stress Factors

The participants reported that academic achievement was burdensome in light of the everyday stressors. Fourteen of the participants selected that living in a violent environment was burdensome and fifteen selected that residing in a drug and gang infested environment was burdensome. According to Hare (1993) eighty-six percent of black youth live in poverty where violence and drugs are noticeable. However, the individual's who participated in the project proved that one can achieve academically and complete high school no matter what the adverse conditions are. Although fifteen selected a death in their family was burdensome to them in completing high school, it did not rank as high as living in a violent or

drug infested environment. Eventhough a family members death is noted, it appears that the type of environment one lived in was a major factor in trying to cope with daily stressors and live in such conditions to complete high school.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study found support for the hypothesis. All of the participants indicated that they had various influencing factors that contributed to them completing high school. These factors included, but were not limited to, mothers, teachers, counselors, and being involved in community organizations. In addition, the study showed that the participants' environmental stressors (violence, gangs, and drugs) were possible inhibitors toward their completing high school. Past policies have failed to address the damages of discrimination and institutionalized racism. Although there have been policies aimed to correct the past discrimination, they have failed. This is witnessed by the continued institutionalized racism African Americans face today. These problems will not be solved adequately until the African American population is provided the ability to achieve the same economic opportunities and

results as whites. Research has shown black communities receiving government assistance which continues the cycle of dependency (Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). Once African American's are more economically independent, black owned businesses will invest in the community. Once these changes are made, the African American family will be strengthened and there will be more unity in the community. Since schools are one of the main resources in the community, policies should aim more towards hiring more school counselors and social workers. Programs would be created and implemented in schools to make services more available for parents, teachers, and children. Moreover, this will promote a more collaborative effort by parent(s), teachers, and community leaders on behalf of African American children, to work together to improve their lives academically and personally. For instance, if more counselors and social workers were working in the schools, children academics, and future goals would be addressed more often with parents. Not only will this involve the parents more, children will feel that a positive figure will be there to help them when they need assistance. I believe each worker should have approximately fifteen to twenty students on their case

load. This will allow the counselors or social workers to give more of their time to assist them. As it stands in one San Bernardino high school, one counselor monitors approximately one hundred students. The counselor was only obligated to see each student once before march to indicate their plans for the future. If the students did not go see the counselor, it was likely that the student did not receive guidance.

If there were more counselors and social workers in the schools, crisis intervention programs, mentorship programs, family therapy, as well as brief therapy can be implemented during school hours which will make it more comfortable for children address issues more frequently. African American children need to learn problem solving skills early in their maturation period. Research has indicated that most of these children come from environment's with many stressors (Palley and Robinson, 1990). These individuals, not social workers or counselors, own the power that brings significant change. Social workers and counselors are a resource person with professional training on the use of resources who is committed to people empowerment. In addition, they share knowledge in a way that helps people realize their

accountability, strengths, and their need to help solve their own problems. Since counselors and social workers have received training in school on risk assessment, cultural sensitivity, therapeutic strategies, analyzing person-in-environment, problem solving and coping skills, and family dynamics, more social workers and counselors should be available where children and families are most visible. If intervention was more accessible for African American youth and families, problems should be addressed quickly, and solved more independently. If programs cannot be implemented in schools, they will be just as effective in local community centers and/or agencies.

The need for current research focuses on factors that contribute to African American's completing high school. Future research needs to factor in ways in which mothers, fathers, and siblings have been helpful, and how they can be more helpful to their children academically. Moreover, resources to include teachers, counselors, and books in schools, and in the African American communities needs to be examined to see if those resources are accessible to African American's. In addition, research needs to examine how local politicians and community leaders are addressing the graduation rate among African American's

and what they are doing to ensure that African American's are receiving the assistance they need.

Studying ways in which African American children are receiving help academically will be very helpful for student's in the future. However, research needs to go to those African American's who are having difficulties in academically and ask how can they achieve in school. Research in these area's would be helpful if school staff members and community agencies/centers can analyze, contrast previous research in the area, and possibly make adjustments.

SUMMARY

According to the results of this study, African American's need assistance in order to finish high school. Research has shown that many African American families exist near or below the poverty level and are often members of broken homes (Palley and Robinson 1990). African American mothers continue to carry the majority of the responsibility in raising the children, being a role model, and providing the families with support. In addition, the study proved that success in completing high school was the result of support from parent(s), teachers, and counselors. According to the findings, social support

can come from friends, neighbors, community institutions such as churches, schools, or youth organizations (YMCA, Boys Club, Parks and Rec.). The study also raise the possibility that those who could benefit from such assistance are unaware of the available resources.

African American's who finished high school and achieved a measure of success identified family members and local community involvement as being influential factors in their ability to graduate and for current success. Moreover, self motivation and the belief that they will achieve academically was a key factor. This combined with the mothers constant reassurance and support helped appeared to have developed a strong self esteem in participants.

In summary, African American families may benefit from knowing and understanding what factors contribute to their children completing high school. One goal might be to promote those qualities and strengths that help children complete high school. When those individuals mature, education, family support, and social support will be the factors that helped them achieve.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

The study is designed to help social workers in terms of community intervention, and understand the internal and external factors that contribute to African Americans graduating high school. Due to adverse conditions a good majority of African Americans find themselves in the following situations: poverty stricken families, high unemployment rates, female headed households (that are under employed), and they lack emotional support. This study will be conducted by Robert Pallotta under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Cardona, Professors of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. The Address is 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA. 92407-2397. Phone number (909) 880-5501).

In this study you will receive questions pertaining to age, gender, family economic status during high school, and current status (employed, unemployed, attending school). The questionnaire between ten and twenty minutes to complete.

Please be assured that the information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher. At no time will your name be reported along with your

responses. A contact phone number will be provided at the end of this consent form if any questions or concerns should arise.

It is hoped that the results of this study will increase understanding of the adverse conditions and contributing factors that effect the high school graduation rate of African Americans. Hopefully, with this understanding more effective intervention strategies can be implemented. Your participation will be appreciated and helpful in attaining this goal. However, please understand that your participation is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to respond. If you do participate, please sign the consent form. I acknowledge that I have been informed of and understand the nature and purpose of this study. I freely consent to participate. I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Participants Signature

Robert Pallotta, MSW Student

Dr. Lucy Cardona, Research Advisors.

Researchers Signature

APPENDIX B

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study you have participated in is designed to investigate the factors contributing to African American's graduating high school. The research data will be collected through questionnaire. All data collected will be confidential. You may receive the final findings by contacting Dr. Lucy Cardona, Professor of Social Work and project advisor at (909) 880-7029. If personal issues should arise after completing the questionnaire or, interview referrals to appropriate services will be made available.

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

Name _____

Hello!

My name is Robert. I am a student at California State University, San Bernardino conducting a survey/interview for my class research project. I am interested in finding out what factors contribute to the high school graduation rate of African Americans. Your participation will be appreciated and important with regards to data/examination of this study. Please write your name on the survey. When the data is collected, your name will be omitted. The questionnaire should take about ten to twenty minutes to complete. Thank you.

1. Gender: Male_____ Female_____

2. Age _____

3. Where did you receive your high school diploma?

a. United States

b. Foreign Country

4. What did your grades average out to when you graduated
(please check one):

A ____ A- ____ B+ ____ B ____ B- ____ C+ ____ C ____ C- ____ Below
C- ____

5. Circle your families economic status during your high
school years:

- (a) under \$20,000 per year
- (b) \$20,000-50,000 per year
- (c) over \$50,000 per year

6. Please specify other degrees you have earned:

- a. Associates Degree (A.A)
- b. Bachelors Degree (B.A)
- c. Masters Degree (M.A)
- d. Doctorate Degree (Ph.D)
- e. Other (please specify) _____

7. Please specify your current status (please circle one).

- a. Student
- b. Employed - full time or part time (please circle one)
- c. Unemployed
- d. Self employed

8. How much education did your father attain?

- a. Elementary ____
- b. Junior High/Middle School ____
- c. High School ____
- d. College ____
- e. Masters Degree ____
- f. Other (please specify) ____

9. How much education did your mother attain?

- a. Elementary ____
- b. Junior High/Middle School ____
- c. High School ____
- d. College ____
- e. Masters Degree ____
- f. Other (please specify) ____

10. How much education did your siblings attain? If you have more than one sibling, please indicate the number next to the categories.

- a. Elementary_____
- b. Junior High/Middle School_____
- c. High School_____
- d. College_____
- e. Masters Degree_____
- f. Other (please specify)_____

11. Please indicate what your immediate and long term goals and aspirations were when you finished high school.

- a. Go to college_____
- b. Go to trade school_____
- c. Work part time_____
- d. Work full time_____
- e. Other (please specify)_____

In the following questions you will have to give your best answer, then rank them accordingly.

12. Please rank in order (1 being most, 3 being least) the family member who you believe was influential in your being able to complete high school.

- a. Mother____
- b. Father____
- c. Brother____
- d. Sister____
- e. Aunt____
- f. Uncle____
- g. Grandfather____
- h. Grandmother____
- i. Other (please specify)____

13. Please indicate in rank order (1 being most, 3 being least) those other individuals who were helpful to you getting your education.

- a. Teacher____
- b. Counselor____
- c. Mentor____
- d. Friend____
- e. Neighbor____
- f. Other (please specify)____

14. Please rank in order (1 being most, 3 being least) how instrumental the following forms of encouragement were in your finishing high school.

- a. Someone to help with school work____
- b. Someone to give me encouragement____
- c. Someone to give me spiritual guidance
- d. Someone to give me advice____
- e. Someone to other (please specify)____

15. Please rank in order (1 being most, 3 being least) the group that was influential in your completing high school.

- a. Church Group____
- b. Sports Team____
- c. Theater/Arts____
- d. Student Counsel____
- e. Other (please specify)____

16. Please rank in order (1 being most, 3 being least) those other factors that might have influenced your being able to complete high school.

- a. T.V Show/Movie____
- b. Actor/Celebrity____
- c. Singer/Music group____
- d. Book____
- e. Self Motivation____
- f. Other (please specify)____

17. Please rank in order (1 being most, 3 being least) those stress factors that you think were the most burdensome in your being able to finish high school.

- a. Violent Environment____
- b. Drug/Gang Environment____
- c. Death of an immediate family member____
- d. Illness of a family member____
- e. Other (please specify)____

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